CLAIMS:

5   1.   A mission control (administration) system for controlling multiple game playing satellite computers on a network comprising:

(a) a mission control computer which operates administrative programs for performing administrative functions for multiple game playing stations connected by the network;

(b) a plurality of game playing satellite computers provided at respective game

10   playing stations each maintaining a plurality of game programs;

(c) a network connecting the mission control computer to the plurality of game playing satellite computers,

(d) wherein said mission control computer includes a mission control program for controlling the plurality of games available to be played on the game playing satellite computers by

15   issuing generic control commands to the game playing satellite computers, and

(e) wherein each of said game playing satellite computers includes a satellite game control program for controlling each of the plurality of game programs available to be played on the satellite computer by receiving a generic control command to start a selected game program issued by said mission control computer and loading in response thereto a game-specific command set

20   corresponding to the selected game program, and by providing said mission control computer with a status report of the status of the selected game program being played on the satellite computer.

2.   A system according to Claim 1, wherein a game program on a satellite computer generates a log file tracking the operation of the game program, and said satellite game

25   control program parses the log files for predetermined keywords indicative of desired status information and provides the status information to the mission control program.

3.   A system according to Claim 1, wherein a game program on a satellite computer generates one or more of the following sources of information tracking the operation of

the game program, and said satellite game control program parses the source of information for desired status information and provides the status information to the mission control program: game log files; dialog boxes or windows opened by the game program; messages from the Notification API; and a method used by the game program for external communications.

4.   A system according to Claim 1, wherein the satellite game control program maintains a database of game-specific command sets for each of the game programs offered on the satellite computer, and, when a control command is issued by the mission control computer to start a particular game, the satellite control program loads the corresponding game-specific command set from its database.

5.   A system according to Claim 4, wherein said game-specific command sets are derived by analyzing each game program and determining the common activation, termination and control logic for the game.

6.   A system according to Claim 1, wherein said mission control program maintains a database of game data based upon information provided by the satellite game playing computers, and generates one or more administrative reports from the group consisting of: system-wide gaming reports; membership and player statistics; detailed statistics on specific games played by specific players; current status of the system, hardware, and software troubleshooting.

7.   A system according to Claim 1, wherein a plurality of mission control computers are maintained at respective mission control sites and are connected via a network to a network server that provides an online interface of the mission control system to the Internet.

8.   A system according to Claim 7, wherein said network server includes a master database for replicating game data from the mission control sites.

9.   A system according to Claim 8, wherein said online interface allows players

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to perform one or more activities of the group consisting of: looking up statistics for games they have played; seeing how their buddies are doing; seeing statistics for comparison at other sites; downloading statistics for their own later use; maintaining their accounts; joining or maintaining their status with a group of players; and communicating with other players.

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       10.   A method for controlling multiple game playing satellite computers on a network comprising:

      (a) providing a mission control computer for performing administrative functions for multiple game playing stations on the network;

10   (b) connecting multiple game playing satellite computers on the network to the mission control computer, each of which maintains a plurality of game programs;

      (c) issuing from the mission control computer a generic control command to any designated one of the game playing satellite computers to start any selected game program, and

      (d) the designated satellite computer responding to the generic "game start" command

15 by loading from its database a game-specific command set corresponding to the selected game program for allowing the selected game program to be played on the satellite computer, and providing the mission control computer with a status report of the status of the selected game program being played on the satellite computer.

20   11.   A method according to Claim 10, wherein the game program on the satellite computer generates a log file tracking the operation of the game program, and a satellite game control program on the satellite computer parses the log files for predetermined keywords indicative of desired status information and provides the status information to the mission control computer.

25   12.   A method according to Claim 10, wherein the satellite computer obtains status information on the game program from one or more of the following sources: game log files; dialog boxes or windows opened by the game program; messages from the Notification API; and a method used by the game program for external communications.

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13.   A method according to Claim 10, wherein the satellite computer maintains a database of game-specific command sets for each of the game programs offered on the satellite computer.

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14.   A method according to Claim 13, wherein each of the game-specific command sets is derived by analyzing each game program and determining the common activation, termination and control logic for the game.